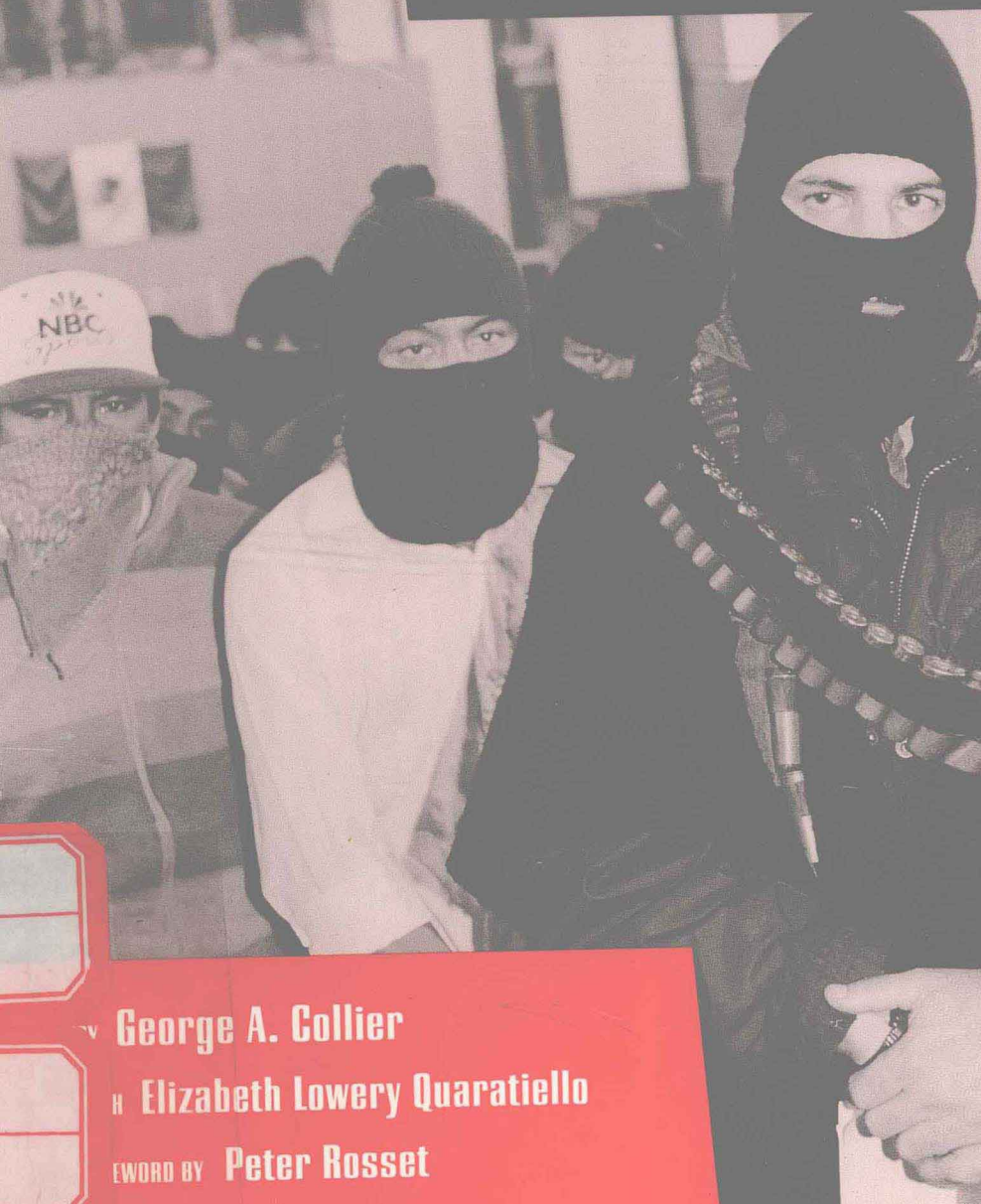


BASTA!

Land and the
Zapatista Rebellion
in Chiapas



by **George A. Collier**

with **Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello**

introduction by **Peter Rosset**

BASTA!
Land and the Zapatista Rebellion
in Chiapas

by
George A. Collier
with
Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello

Foreword by Peter Rosset

A FOOD FIRST BOOK
The Institute for Food and Development Policy
Oakland, California

Copyright © 1994 by the Institute for Food and
Development Policy.
All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:
Collier, George Allen, 1942—

Basta! : land and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas /
George A. Collier, with Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello ;
foreword by Peter Rosset.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-935028-65-X : \$12.95

1. Peasantry — Mexico — Chiapas. 2. Land reform —
Mexico — Chiapas. 3. Agriculture — Economic aspects —
Mexico — Chiapas. 4. Chiapas (Mexico) — Rural
conditions. 5. Chiapas (Mexico) — Economic conditions.
6. Rural development — Mexico — Chiapas.

I. Quaratiello, Elizabeth Lowery, 1964— II. Title.

HD1531.M6C65 1994

333.3'17275 — dc20

94-36292

CIP

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

To order additional copies of this book, please write or call our
distributor:

Subterranean Company

Box 160

265 South Fifth Street

Monroe, Oregon 97456

800-274-7826

Design and typesetting: Harvest Graphics

Cover Design: Lory Poulson

Cover: AP photo © Damian Dovarganes

BASTA!
Land and the Zapatista Rebellion
in Chiapas

To David and Lucy
and to Stephen, midnight's child

Foreword

by Peter Rosset

The Zapatista rebellion that began on January 1st, 1994, was an event laden with significance for Mexico and for the world. Thus this extraordinary book can be read on various levels. First and foremost, it is a clear and informative history of the uprising and its relationship to that most important of commodities in rural areas: land. It shows why indigenous people and peasants in the Mexican state of Chiapas chose to take up arms. Yet it also takes a remarkable step toward a more nuanced understanding of indigenous and peasant communities than we have had before. It helps us understand how and why the Zapatista Army of National Liberation—the EZLN—is different from previous armed struggles in Mesoamerica and elsewhere. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is a poignant case study of how neo-liberal economic restructuring—called structural adjustment in the Third World and Reaganomics in the U.S.—reaches into the very heart of communities, enriching the few while impoverishing the many; ultimately turning neighbor against neighbor and leading inexorably toward violent confrontations.

George Collier draws upon 30 years of research among the indigenous people of Chiapas to shatter the images held by the Left and the Right, whether they be of ‘noble savages’ holding out against the ravages of capitalism or of ‘backward Indians’ holding back economic development. Taking us inside people’s lives, he and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello show how the poor in indigenous communities are doubly victimized—first by the relationship between their communities and national or international economies, and second by relatively wealthy leaders inside their own villages who exploit them further in a myriad of ways. Yet Collier and Quaratiello also show how, when given half a chance, peasants and indigenous people can seize upon economic opportunities in

dynamic ways that intellectuals of either persuasion had previously claimed were impossible, exposing the myth of the insular community, cut off from the outside world. Without taking this additional step in our understanding of peasant societies, we would be doomed to endlessly repeat the past failures of rural development policies throughout the world.

The rank and file members of the EZLN are refugees from villages where local strongmen, or *caciques*, denied them the right to make a living. Given this anti-leader mentality, it should come as no surprise that Zapatista ideology rejects the vanguardism and top-down organization of previous guerrilla movements. Rather they emphasize communal decision making and stake no claims on state power, instead calling, Gramsci-like, upon Mexican civil society to remake the nation in a form more responsive to the needs of the poor. Collier and Quaratiello show how this uprising, despite coming from largely indigenous communities, reaches out to all of the poor and disenfranchised regardless of their ethnicity, something surprising and perhaps even refreshing in this age of ethnic conflict.

This is a book about the Zapatistas, and about the 'Indigenous' and 'Peasant Questions' that have troubled Latin America for so long. But it is also a book about people's lives, a book that cuts easily across the geographic and cultural distances that separate readers in the North from Mayan communities in Chiapas. It is in showing ordinary lives, complete with petty and not-so-petty struggles, that the authors are at their best. This book makes it absolutely clear what the economic restructuring of the 1980s has left in its wake, and while their chosen case study is of Chiapas, what they have to say is equally relevant to South Central Los Angeles or any other community that has had its fabric ripped asunder by home-grown or exported Reaganomics. The growing gulf between rich and poor leads to the desperation and violence of neighbor against neighbor. In Chiapas, at least, a new social grouping has emerged from the desolation, represented by the Zapatistas and their spokesman, *Sub-comandante Marcos*. Perhaps they are showing all of us a path forward, setting aside the ethnic differences that separate us and the verticalism that often stifles popular movements.

Abbreviations

ANCIEZ	Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata/National Independent Emiliano Zapata Peasant Alliance
ANAGSA	Aseguradora Nacional Agrícola y Ganadero/National Agriculture and Livestock Insurance Program
ARIC-UU	Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo - Unión de Uniones/Rural Collective Interest Association - Union of Unions
CCRI	Comité Clandestino de Revolución Indígena/Committee of Clandestine Indigenous Revolution
CEOIC	Consejo Estatal de Organizaciones Indígenas y Campesinas/Chiapas State Indigenous Peasant Council
CIOAC	Central Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos/Independent Confederation of Agricultural Workers and Peasants
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina/National Peasant Confederation
CNPA	Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala/National "Plan de Ayala" Coordinating Committee
CNPI	Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas/National Council of Indigenous Pueblos
CROM	Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana/Mexican Regional Labor Confederation
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México/Confederation of Mexican Workers
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional/Zapatista National Liberation Army
FDN	Frente Democrático Nacional/National Democratic Front
INI	Instituto Nacional Indigenista/National Indianist Institute
INMECAFE	Instituto Mexicano del Café/Mexican Coffee Institute

ISMAM	Indígenas de la Sierra Madre de Motozintla/Indians of the Sierra Madre of Motozintla
LP	Línea Proletaria/Proletarian Line
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
OCEZ	Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata/Emiliano Zapata Peasant Organization
ORIACH	Organización Indígena de los Altos de Chiapas/ Indigenous Organization of Highland Chiapas
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional/National Action Party
PP	Política Popular/Popular Politics
PRA	Plan de Rehabilitación Agraria/Agrarian Rehabilitation Plan
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática/Party of the Democratic Revolution
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional/Institutional Revolutionary Party
PRODESCH	Programa de Desarrollo Socioeconómico de los "Altos" de Chiapas/Socioeconomic Development Program for the Highlands of Chiapas
PRONASOL	Programa Nacional de Solidaridad/National Solidarity Program
PST	Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores/Socialist Workers Party
SAM	Sistema Alimentario Mexicano/Mexican Food System
SEDESOL	Secretaría de Desarrollo Social/Ministry of Social Development
SRA	Secretaría de Reforma Agraria/Ministry of Agrarian Reform
UU	Unión de Uniones/Union of Unions

Preface

In January 1991, Zinacanteco Indians in Chiapas questioned me about the Persian Gulf War. Why had Saddam Hussein and George Bush brought countries on opposite sides of the world into war? Would burning Kuwait oil fields truly pollute the world's skies and seas? Might warfare come to Chiapas?

A different kind of war arose in Chiapas on January 1, 1994 when the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) rebelled against the Mexican government in a region that seems remote and exotic to many. But Chiapas and the Persian Gulf are closer than one might think, drawn together by the geopolitics of petroleum that have transformed Mexico's agrarian economy since the OPEC crisis stunned the world in 1972.

Mexico began to produce oil for export in the 1970s, pouring borrowed petrodollars into development that drew people out of the countryside and confronted the nation with shortfalls in basic foods and a crisis in agriculture. Subsidies and agrarian reform helped stave off the setbacks in agriculture until 1982, when dropping world oil prices plunged Mexico into a crisis of debt. Austerity and economic restructuring cut support for agrarian programs, and the problems in the countryside worsened. The Zapatista rebellion responded to this crisis.

I began studying peasant agriculture in the highlands of Chiapas in the early 1960s and have witnessed many of the changes that oil-led development has brought to the lives and livelihoods of Zinacantecos and other indigenous peasants of the region. This book about the background to the Zapatista rebellion draws on the unusual privilege of having been able to return to Chiapas repeatedly through more than three decades of dramatic change.

About myself and the perspectives that I bring to this writing, I have the following to say. My values have been shaped by a family

firmly committed to New Deal Democratic politics, probably inclining me to sympathy for national states such as Mexico that have embraced responsibilities for popular welfare. Nonetheless, born in 1942, I matured after World War II in the era of Cold War that erased much of our consciousness of class and politics. It was when I began to read about Latin American and Iberian history that I decided to study agrarian politics and change.

At the time of Lázaro Cárdenas's 1934–40 presidency in Mexico, my grandfather, John Collier, Sr., was Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the Roosevelt administration and an activist for Indianism (national programs on behalf of indigenous people) in the Americas. I knew him in his elder years as a somewhat eccentric, introspective, yet visionary person whose love of wilderness and solitude, I later realized, stemmed from how he had come to grips with adolescent depression after the suicide and death of his parents. As an anthropologist, I have always been intrigued by, yet distanced from, Indianism, which I understand in historical perspective as partaking of what Renato Rosaldo describes as “imperialist nostalgia.”¹ It is not for lack of interest in the contemporary Maya that I take this position; I have mastered Tzotzil as a way of learning from Zinacanteco and other indigenous people of central highland Chiapas about their history, politics, and views of the world. My experience with and understanding of the Maya contribute to my skepticism of those who interpret the Zapatista movement primarily as a Maya movement when it has so much in common with the shared concerns of the class of rural poor. Indigenous people who have responded to the Zapatista calling have done so primarily because they see justice in the Zapatista's political and economic demands on behalf of the countryside's poor.

I am also wary of idealizations of peasants. I see today's peasantries as less egalitarian and more differentiated by class and politics than do many analysts. The appeal to collective sentiments is often combined with maneuvering for personal power. Many of the Mexican indigenous and other peasants I shall talk about have protagonized activism for land, or have challenged the ruling party on behalf of their fellows at one stage of their political careers while taking the side of the national state and exercising its power at another stage. Their rise to power and their exercise of power

have as much to do with the relationships in which peasants strive for advantage over one another as with the ways in which the regional or national bourgeoisie gain advantage over them.

I have learned a great deal about Chiapas from the work and insight of colleagues in what began as the Harvard Chiapas Project, led by Evon Z. Vogt, who introduced me and dozens of other students to research in highland Chiapas. Frank and Francesca Cancian, Jane Collier, John Haviland, Robert and Mimi Laughlin, Jan and Diane Rus, and Evon and Catherine Vogt have shared lives and work in more ways than I can credit.

Robert Alvarez, Merielle Flood, Daniel Mountjoy, and Ronald Nigh have collaborated in some of my research and writing. Ramón González Ponciano, Aída Hernández Castillo, Gary Gossen, Lourdes de León, June Nash, and Stuart Plattner have generously shared writing and advice. I am grateful for the research assistance of Namino Glantz, José Hernández Pérez, María Hernández Pérez, Antonio Pérez Hernández, and Apen Ruiz and for the hospitality of Marcy Jacobsen, Janet Marren and Kippy Nigh. This book has also benefitted from comments and suggestions from Federico Besserer, Frank Cancian, Jane Collier, Mimi Laughlin, Bill Maurer, Stuart and Phyllis Plattner, Lucía Rayas, and Peter Rosset; and from research material made available by James Breedlove, Dan Rozkuszka, and Teresa Sierra. I also wish to thank staff, student, and faculty colleagues at the Department of Anthropology, Stanford, for opportunities to talk about my analysis of the events in Chiapas.

I am very grateful for the assistance of institutions and colleagues in Chiapas. The Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura (ICC) has generously shared publications of vital research by scholars of the region. I especially appreciate the assistance extended to me by Andrés Fábregas Puig, Director General of the ICC, and by Jesús Morales Bermúdez. I thank the Centro de Estudios Universitarios (CEU) and librarian María Elena Fernández Galán for published and unpublished source materials. The Centro de Investigaciones Ecológicas del Sureste (CIES) has shared library and map resources, and I thank Pablo Farias, Ignacio March, and Manuel Parra for their collegiality and assistance. CIESAS, Sureste, the regional office of Mexico's Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, has

also shared library materials, as has INAREMAC, the Instituto de Asesoría Antropológica para la Región Maya, A.C. I appreciate access to the map collections of Na Bolom and of the Fundación Arqueológica Nuevo Mundo in San Cristóbal de las Casas.

To the people of Zinacantán, and especially to those of the hamlet of Apas, I owe special thanks for having been welcomed over the years as a guest and researcher.

I am grateful for research support from the National Science Foundation for the study of "Agrarian Change in Southeastern Mexico" (BNS-8804607) and for "Methodological Training for a GIS Application in Cultural Anthropology" (DBS-9221376); from the Consortium of International Earth Sciences Information Network (CIESIN) for study of "Deforestation, Land Use & Development in the Greater Mayan Region"; from the Stanford Humanities Center for time to think and write about the changing livelihoods and politics of Zinacantán; and from the Center for Latin American Studies for research support in Chiapas during summer 1993.

The publishers of *BioScience*, *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, and *Research in Economic Anthropology* graciously allowed me to draw upon maps and materials in my previously published work. Chapter Five draws extensively on an essay published as a discussion paper by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Chapter Six is based on a recent article I wrote for *Dialectical Anthropology* (Kluwer Academic Publishers). I am grateful for permission to borrow from these previous works.

Elizabeth Quaratiello and I have collaborated in writing this book, which is based on my research and other scholarly writing. We wish to thank our families for patience and forbearance in allowing us to bring the work to fruition.

George A. Collier
Stanford, California

Contents

Illustrations	viii
Foreword by Peter Rosset	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Preface	xiii
Introduction	1
1. Chiapas and Mexico	15
The Legacy of Conquest	17
Export Enclaves and National Consolidation	22
Mexico's Revolution	27
Agrarian Reform	30
2. Eastern Chiapas: Land	37
Colonizing Eastern Chiapas	37
Agrarian Reform and Conflict	45
3. Eastern Chiapas: The Building of Social Movements	53
Protestant Evangelization	55
Catholic Responses	61
Peasant Organizations	66
Challenges to the Government	69
Disillusionment and Disagreement	76
The Growth of the Guerilla Movement	81
4. Oil and the Crisis in Mexican Agriculture	89
Crisis in Agriculture	91
Energy Development in Chiapas	94
Restructuring Peasant Agriculture	101
5. The Toll of Restructuring on Lives and Communities	107
Land and the Changing Economy	110
Gender and Generation Gaps	113
The Widening Gap Between Rich and Poor	116
Leaders Who No Longer Need Followers	119
6. Exclusion: The New Politics	125
"New Law," "New Politics"	126
Control of Money	130
Tradition Versus Literacy and Law	135
Divided Solidarity	139
7. Transitions and Prospects	147
Prospects	149
Notes	155
References	163
Index	174
About the Authors	182
Institute Publications	183
About Food First	186

Illustrations

Figures

0.1 Chiapas and the Area of Zapatista Rebellion.	3
1.1 "A Rich Land, a Poor People."	17
1.2 Export and Development in Nineteenth Century Chiapas.	23
1.3 Agrarian Reform in Chiapas.	32
2.1 Eastern Chiapas Land Tenure, 1953 and 1991.	38
2.2 Colonization and Landscape Changes in Eastern Chiapas.	42
3.1 The Spread of Protestantism.	56
3.2 Independent Organizations in Chiapas.	72
4.1 Trends in Mexican Energy Development.	92
4.2 Sites of Energy Development.	96
4.3 Declines in Agriculture, 1960 to 1980.	97
4.4 Growth in Construction and Transport, 1960 to 1980.	97
4.5 Changing Intensity of Apas Farmland Use.	102
7.1 Organizational Chart, Unión de Ejidos "Profesor Otilio Montaña."	153

Photographs

1.1 Agrarian Colonists.	33
1.2 Ejidal Assembly.	33
3.1 Comandante Ramona.	61
4.1 The Chicoasen Dam.	93
4.2 Construction Skills.	98
4.3 Peasant Commerce.	100
4.4 Indigenous Truckers.	100
4.5 Herbicide Use.	103
5.1 Making Tortillas.	112
5.2 New Consumer Goods.	115
6.1 Organizing Rally for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in Zinacantán.	133

Introduction

When a housemaid in the Chiapas state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, suddenly quit her job, why had she just used her entire Christmas bonus to buy hundreds of bandages?

Why did a man purchase an itinerant merchant's entire stock of rubber boots in March 1993 at the entrance to Palenque, Chiapas's famous classic Mayan ruin?

What made peasants eking out a precarious existence in the rain forests of eastern Chiapas cite "war" as a threat more dangerous to the world than "poverty," "disease," "deforestation," or "pollution" in a 1992 survey of attitudes about global change?¹

In the summer of 1993, Tucson writer Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, a novel prognosing native American rebellion from Chiapas to Arizona, suddenly captured an audience of readers in Chiapas. Was there a special reason for such fascination?

The answers to many such puzzles suggested themselves on January 1, 1994, when the EZLN (the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* or Zapatista Army of National Liberation), equipped with rubber boots, homemade army uniforms, bandanas, ski masks, and weapons ranging from handmade wooden rifles to Uzi machine guns, seized towns in eastern and central Chiapas, proclaiming a revolution on the inaugural day of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Taking advantage of the New Year holiday to catch security forces off guard, the Zapatistas—a force of young, disciplined and mostly indigenous men and women soldiers—ransacked the town halls of Altamirano, Chanal, Huistán, Las Margaritas, Oxchuc, Ocosingo, and San Cristóbal de las Casas—once the colonial seat of government of Chiapas and today an important commercial and tourist center. Some burned district attorney, judicial, and police records (but spared archives in San Cristóbal that a local scholar told them had historic value). Others fanned out into the

mountains to seek recruits from among the indigenous and other peasants of the region.

Treating startled tourists and civilians with courtesy, the EZLN pronounced itself in rebellion against the government, the army, and the police. In printed circulars and broadcasts from captured Ocosingo radio station XOECH, the Zapatistas declared:

Hoy Decimos Basta! Today we say enough is enough! To the people of Mexico: Mexican brothers and sisters: We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later [when] the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental education so that others can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food, and no education. Nor are we able freely and democratically to elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children.²

Invoking Article 39 of Mexico's 1917 Constitution, which invests national sovereignty and the right to modify government in the people of Mexico, they called on other Mexicans to help them depose the "illegal dictatorship" of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's government and party. They declared war on the Mexican armed forces and called on international organizations and the Red Cross to monitor under the Geneva Conventions of War. They appealed to other Mexicans to join their insurgency.

Within twenty-four hours, the EZLN launched an attack on the Rancho Nuevo army base about six miles southeast of San Cristóbal and freed 179 prisoners from a nearby penitentiary. They kidnapped Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, governor of Chiapas from 1982 to 1988, announcing he would be tried summarily and shot for crimes of repression. Instead, he was "sentenced" to a life term of hard peasant labor.

The Mexican government quickly moved 12,000 troops and equipment into the region. Within days, and after two pitched battles, the Zapatistas retreated east and southward out of the